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ABSTRACT

Many problems are involved in interdisciplinary teaching. Below are some proposals for an interdisciplinary course in the social sciences for secondary school teachers. This type of teaching can be done with either one instructor or a team. If one instructor is used, care must be taken not to build the course solely around that person, so that if s/he leaves, the course disappears. The instructor must have a strong interest in developing interdisciplinary courses, and be willing to spend a substantial amount of time reading material from other fields. There are at least two ways to deal with subject matter: (a) use specific problem areas as case studies, where emphasis is on methods used to arrive at answers, and (b) include games with a strong interdisciplinary flavor. If a team of instructors is used, new problems arise. The team must be closely coordinated and each member must have a fundamental appreciation of the other disciplines. One way of organizing the team is in a panel which meets with every class. Another way is for instructors to teach individually, but to work together on a selected topic for a given period of time. If commitment is made, any of these proposals is workable. It is felt, however, that one is more likely to find a single individual strongly committed to the interdisciplinary movement. Although flexibility is lost, commitment may be more important. (PB)

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APPROACHES TO AN INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSE IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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Interdisciplinary teaching is a bandwagon, and like most bandwagons, it can be approached in a helter-skelter or in a systematic and well-thought out fashion. There are gains as well as losses inherent in interdisciplinary work. These should be recognized with proposals designed to take full advantage of the strengths and to minimize the effects of the weaknesses.

For example, one of the weaknesses of a single interdisciplinary course is that subject matter detail is sacrificed in favor of broadly based generalities. Even when the course is taught with an orientation to a specific problem area, such as urban transportation, the rigor of analysis that is possible in a disciplinary setting becomes impossible under the time constraints of a single quarter.

A related issue in this regard is the inability to teach "categorization" as an interdisciplinary basis. The student is not taught what is one of the more important facets of any scientific enquiry: the ability to extract out the essential elements of a given problem. Then, the student does not see that a problem might be primarily economic, social, or political in form.

These types of problems become even more acute if the person offering the course is not trained himself on an interdisciplinary basis. Since the educational system has traditionally been conducted along discipline lines, the chances of finding such a person would be very slim.

In order to overcome this additional weakness, one person is usually asked to undertake a "self-contained" training program or some type of a team approach is suggested. Both of these have their own set of problems.

The purpose of this report is to suggest some alternatives that will relate to the questions raised above. Course proposals will be proposed on a

part of the report with a discussion of that proposal's weaknesses and strengths attached. Finally, the author's impression as to which proposal he most wants will be presented along with some explanation as to why that proposal might be singled out.

The proposal will include in a single, four credit course to be taught for a one quarter duration. The course will be for secondary teachers that are currently involved in specific subject areas in an attempt to broaden their perspective with respect to problems in the social sciences. It is, by necessity, a survey type of course covering a wide range of methodologies dealing with social problem areas. It is doubtful that the successful completion of this course will prepare the student to teach interdisciplinary material upon return to the high school, but at least an awareness should be achieved allowing for discussion on a broad range of topics.

Since teaching position are primarily available, basically

The eventual problem of this exercise is that there is no one instructor currently on a faculty that has a background that is sufficient to teach a truly interdisciplinary course. This assumption is undoubtedly true, since most faculty members have had training, at least on the undergraduate level, in only discrete fields.

The key is to avoid building a course around any one person and his particular fields of interest. Steps should be a specific sequence in which this course is to be developed, and since the word that created a demand for this course is probably a long term word, the course must be organized in a general enough way so that one professor's leaving the campus does not invalidate the course but lack of an instructor or requires a complete course redesign.

degree of flexibility that should enable the course to be taught on a long term basis; even with faculty members leaving and joining the team.

PROPOSAL III: PROBLEMS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

The formal proposal for this course is presented in Appendix III to this report. The content is left in a vague form since the specific topics to be discussed will vary with both the times and with the particular interests of the team members. The real feature of the course is in the method of instruction.

The teacher in the course actually becomes a panel of instructors, i.e., every member of the teaching team will meet every class. Topics that were chosen for discussion during the preparatory meetings discussed above will be presented with each panel member contributing whatever insights that he and his discipline might have to offer.

Panel discussions are not new to the world in terms of their contributions to various subject matter of concern to a broad audience. This would be a bit of a different approach in formal classroom teaching. The discussions that would come out of such a group would allow for questions and answers of any disciplines represented. In other words, the students would have the opportunity to integrate the disciplines through both the formal presentation and through the important informal phase of class discussions.

Unlike a typical panel discussion, however, the close coordination and integration of ideas will have already taken place during the previous and on-going meetings between team members. In addition, the team members should find that, over the years, they themselves would be gaining a broader understanding of the range of approaches that could be taken to a social problem and that their ability to carry on interdisciplinary work in other areas, such as social research, would be enhanced. The more enthusiastic and diligent the team, the greater the probability of these side benefits accruing to the

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faculty members that make up that team.

PROPOSAL IV: PROBLEMS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES.

The formal proposal for this final course is contained in Appendix IV. The multiple topic notion remains and the team teaching approach remains. The primary difference is that the team now teaches as individuals rather than as a panel.

Probably the strongest point that can be raised for a course of this type over the panel approach is that it is less taxing on the team members' time since each member is only responsible for a section of the course.

The course would be taught in weekly segments on a selected topic by topic basis. Again, the emphasis would be on the approach to the topic rather than emphasizing the topic itself. If a given topic is too broad to cover in four class sessions (one week), additional time could be allocated.

Even though this type of a class would be less taxing on actual teaching time, it should not be less taxing in preparation time. The factor of close coordination that has been harped on at great lengths above is as important, and maybe it is even more important, than is the case with any of the other proposed forms of organization.

The sociologist that is discussing his disciplines' approach to the analysis of the ghetto should be well aware of the economist's approach the day before, and so on. Each should be prepared to discuss the others insights on both a critical and an analytical basis. Each should have the capacity to point out the differences and similarities to be found in their analysis of a social phenomenon.

Finally, each must be prepared to meet with the students as individuals for consultation and other forms of help. This preparation goes beyond a

simple "willingness" on the part of the instructor. It also required that he be well versed as to the total "goings-on" during the conduct of the course.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The amount of work that is required if a workable interdisciplinary program of any type is to be a success cannot be overemphasized. Strong commitment must be made in this instance, as in all instances where new and innovative programs are being developed. If this commitment is made, then any one of the proposals that are outlined above and in the Appendices would be workable.

It was promised at the beginning of this paper that the author's opinion as to the "best" proposals would be presented with reasons for the selection. The commitment factor lays the basis for this attempt.

To get coordination and cooperation from a team is a risky proposition at best, although success along these lines greatly enhances the "flexibility" of the course. Therefore, if a team could be developed under the conditions outlined above, it would have the strongest input into the high school teacher's frame of thinking. The panel approach would be preferred over the individual due to its ability to handle diverse questions on a daily basis.

It is much more likely that a single individual could be found that is truly excited about the interdisciplinary movement, if it can be termed as a movement. Flexibility is lost, but the commitment may be more important.

In looking at the proposals that involve an individual and that would truly give the secondary teacher something to take back to the high school, Proposal 2 seems the most likely to succeed. Both the teacher and the students have a physical medium, the game, that they can relate to in analyzing social phenomenon. The secondary school teacher has the added bonus of a tool for

teaching his or her own classes.

The dependence on published games for subject matter weakens the proposal somewhat, but as more and more of such games are developed, a certain degree of flexibility in choice will be developed.

In summary, the greater the possibility for close team work in a university, the stronger the team approach. The less this possibility presents itself, the more the university is forced to rely on the individual approach. If the course is to be something other than the background of a single individual, the dependence of some medium may be required. Games and gaming techniques may provide that needed medium.

APPENDIX I

COURSE PROPOSAL INVOLVING A SINGLE DISCIPLINE
ORIENTED TOWARD PROBLEM-SOLVING METHODOLOGIES

I. Catalog Description:

A. Course Title: Approaches to Social Understanding

B. Catalog Description: The analysis of social problems on a case study basis, such as: the ghetto, crime, the environment, and the developing country. Emphasis will be placed on teaching approaches to problem solution taken from the methodologies of several disciplines within the Social Sciences. The course is oriented to the secondary teacher of Social Studies.

II. Content and Methods:

A. Content: The course being proposed would use specific problem areas as case studies. Alternative methods of approaching these problems would then be used to try to arrive at explanations or problem solutions in the case study studied. The emphasis would be on the methods used to arrive at these answers rather than on the answers themselves. The tools of the discipline would be taught by their employment in analyzing the case study problems.

B. Methods: Class lectures, assigned readings, and term papers. Meets four quarter hours per week.

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APPENDIX IV

[illegible]

I. Rationale Description

A. Content Title: Gaming Technologies Applied to High School Social Science Curriculum.

B. Content Description: A review of selected interdisciplinary, Social Science related games for the purpose of: (1) learning the techniques of game playing, (2) considerations in application for the selection and construction of such games, and (3) creating an understanding of the particular social phenomenon to which the games relates.

II. Content and Methods

A. Content: Secondary level games have been developed by such organizations as the Center for the Study of Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University. Representative titles of such games include: "Democracy", "Dominoes", "Trade Control", and "The Drug Debate." These games, as stated, will be reviewed and a few selected for further presentation to class. Outside readings will be assigned where applicable to a better understanding of the social issue being highlighted by the game.

B. Methods: Class activities (game playing), lectures, and assigned readings. Review test questions should be used.

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